

Wholesale promotions
Added perks without added responsibility

WE are all for promotion of deserving persons, but the government decision to promote 85 joint secretaries to the rank of additional secretaries despite having no vacancy for the position takes us by surprise. And most of them will be promoted in their current appointment. This is not the first time such promotions have been made. Back in April last year, some 873 senior civil bureaucrats were promoted. However, the advantage of course comes in terms of elevated financial packages and benefits that the new designations will accord. And the promotions are being given despite the fact a large number of civil servants are OSD.

We are told that most of those promoted this time were passed over previously. If the grounds for superseding them were valid, why the promotions now? The rationale for the current promotions is puzzling. This is likely to do little to bring any qualitative change to the administration. What it will do of course is further strain the public exchequer which will have to dish out a large sum per month. And we are told that more such promotions are in the works in the ranks of deputy secretaries and senior assistant secretaries. As things stand now, we will have 452 additional secretaries against 120 posts, 882 joint secretaries against 350 posts and 1,298 deputy secretaries against 830 posts.

In the past promotions were on merit. Either our bureaucrats have all become highly efficient or the objective criteria for promotion have been discarded, and promotion has become a matter of right. Wholesale promotions like these will have a debilitating effect on professionalism, not to speak of the strain on the public exchequer.

Not enough seats in DU library!
Make it a high priority

THE picture in this daily's Friday issue is a reminder of how little we as a nation, have paid attention to the central library of our most prestigious university. The long line of students with their backpacks, waiting for the doors of Dhaka University's public library, just so they can grab the few seats before anyone else, speaks volumes about the dearth of space for students to study.

Reportedly, the library can accommodate around 1,100 students while the University now has over 37,000 students. To exacerbate the situation much of the library space is occupied by outsiders - non students or former students preparing for public service exams. In other countries university libraries are accessible to everyone but that is because they adequately meet the demand of their own students. In the case of DU's central library, priority must go to its current students.

The overall lack of space must be addressed immediately. It is hard to comprehend why this acute crisis has not been addressed by the university authorities. The DU library must be given a very high priority and everything should be done so that maximum students get access to the library materials all the time. The plan for digitization may not be enough and a physical expansion is essential. If students are not provided proper library facilities how do we expect to get the best out of them in terms of great results? For both the fund and space constraints, that are the main problem, the education ministry must step in to solve those. A good spacious library is a sine qua non for any educational institution, more so for one as important as Dhaka University.

COMMENTS

"Juvenile hotel staff killed"
 (May 13, 2016)
 ▼
Ria Faria
 The perpetrators deserve the highest punishment under law for torturing the child so brutally. Violence against children is on the rise; the government must act fast to stop it.

"US, India and Bangladesh extremism"
 (May 12, 2016)
 ▼
Sajid Rashid
 The Bangladesh government should act strategically in this regard.



STRANGER THAN FICTION
Taj Hashmi

THE way the U.S. and Indian governments, and some conservative think tanks in the U.S. are appraising the spate of killings in Bangladesh is very unfortunate. Recently (on May 3rd) the Heritage Foundation organised a workshop in Washington D.C. on the present situation in Bangladesh. The bias of the workshop is well reflected in its title, "How Can Bangladesh Stop the Escalating Extremist Violence?"

It's noteworthy, the Heritage Foundation is a leading ultra-right conservative think tank in the U.S., which favours hegemonic U.S. foreign policy in the Third World. It recently became controversial for publishing a report on the economic costs of illegal immigration to the U.S. Jason Richwine - a co-author of the report - believes Hispanics and Blacks are intellectually inferior to Whites, and have trouble assimilating because of a supposed genetic predisposition to lower IQ.

Three prominent South Asia experts presented papers at the workshop: Samina Ahmed, Ali Riaz, and Liza Curtis. The main objective of the workshop was to start off a joint US-Bangladesh counterterrorism (CT) operation to fight and defeat the so-called Islamist terrorists in Bangladesh. As if the U.S. has been successful in containing Islamist terrorism at home or elsewhere in the world!

Samina Ahmed is quite unambiguous in asserting that the terror attacks have been attempts to destabilise the present government. Although the present Government holds similar view, she incisively points out the following: Bangladesh needs the rule of law; the prevalent zero-sum game of politics is bad; the police are fully politicised; there's no due process and freedom of the judiciary in the country; there prevails a climate of impunity; and the Bangladeshi people in general don't favour either violent extremism, or the present regime under the Awami League.

Ali Reaz points out as to how the politics of expediency and the Awami League government's ambivalence towards political violence are problematic. He points out that while Sheikh Hasina attended the funeral of Ahmed Rajib Haider - the first blogger to be killed - purportedly by Islamist militants in February 2013, and glorified him as a martyr, she now asks freethinkers not to hurt the religious sentiments of Muslims.

Reaz legitimately questions why only hurting the religious sentiments of Muslims, not followers of other

religions, be declared a crime! He believes both the Government and terrorists are intolerant of any dissent or opposition. He raises the question (which I have raised as well) why counter terrorism (CT) was effective in the past, and is faltering today. He, however, favours a joint U.S.-Bangladesh CT operation to overpower the terrorists in Bangladesh.

Liza Curtis is disappointing. Instead of imputing the ongoing terror and political violence solely to bad governance, corruption, and the marginalisation of people, she wants Bangladesh Government's whole-hearted cooperation with its U.S. counterpart. She, however, blames the lack of democracy, extreme political polarizations, and the ideology of Islamism for the killings. She doesn't question if the elusive Islamist terrorism or something else is responsible for the ongoing killings in Bangladesh.

If lack of democracy and terrorism has positive correlation, then one doesn't know how to explain the terror attacks in Western democracies like America, Britain, France, and Belgium! She thinks by promoting Sufism or "liberal/tolerant Islam", and regulating mosques and madrasas, Bangladesh would neutralise Islamist extremism. Adherents of Sufi Islam could be as violent as Mumtaz Qadri - the assassin of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer - who followed Sufism, not Islamist extremism. Millions of Qadri's admirers in Pakistan also belong to certain Sufi schools.

While one appreciates the growing concern of the U.S. government, human rights organisations, and think tanks at the ongoing killings of innocent people (36 in the last 14 months) in Bangladesh - purportedly by Islamist extremists - one wonders as to how they had never been that vocal at the killings of hundreds of innocent Bangladeshis in the last ten years, by criminals, political rivals, and law-enforcers - especially the RAB. Various reports reveal the law enforcers and police allegedly killed more than 1,000 suspects and innocent people through extra-judicial killings between 2004 and 2010. Hundreds of civilians die in "poll-violence". Since February, 78 people got killed at the hands of political rivals during local council elections.

Rampant corruption, unaccountability of rulers, their cronies, bureaucrats, and law-enforcers have virtually turned Bangladesh into Satyajit Roy's Hiralok Rajar Desh. Nothing seems immoral, impossible, disorderly, or surprising at all! The "winners take all" is the rule of the game. The opposition - the real ones, not some pseudo-opposition parties - isn't even entitled to crumbs from the high table.

While innocent people, intellectuals and dissidents get arrested, harassed by law-enforcers, disappear and die, politicians are in a state of denial, and even worse,

busy vilifying each other as killers and anti-state elements. Bangladesh isn't only fast turning into a place of frequent killings, but also into a safe haven for politically well-connected bank defaulters, money launderers, and share-market scammers. Money launderers have so far sent more than 30 thousand crore (thirty billion) taka out of Bangladesh; share-scammers defrauded millions to the tune of several billion takas; and "unknown" criminals robbed more than \$100 million from the Bangladesh Bank. Interestingly, the Finance Minister often rubbishes all criticisms of financial scams, and considers these crimes as growing pains of growth and development.

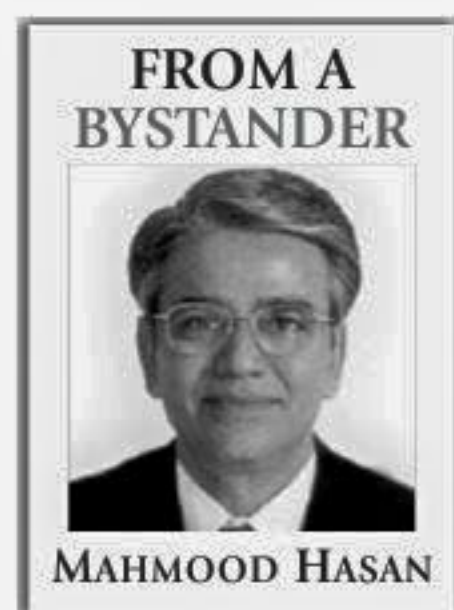
It appears from the Information Minister's recent statement that the Government is contemplating complete media control through a "Media Monitoring Centre" to keep an eye on print and electronic media, including the social media, who are allegedly "trying to create divisions in the society by writing against different religions and beliefs". Human rights activist Sultana Kamal has aptly assessed the situation: "We can't deny that people are afraid to speak up". When people are afraid to speak up, sections of them might resort to anarchy and terrorism.

One may cite the International Crisis Group's latest Report on Bangladesh in this regard: "The Government's heavy-handed measures are damaging its own legitimacy and benefitting extremists If mainstream dissent remains closed, more and more government opponents may come to view violence and violent groups as their only recourse." Nothing could be more insensible than undermining the grassroots, the ordinary people's understandings of what goes on at the top. At the opportune moment, they retaliate against bad governance and tyranny.

I think if Dhaka, Delhi, and Washington can agree to formulate a workable formula to tackle the problem of the ongoing killings in Bangladesh, they need to take the following steps: Firstly, it's essential to know if the killers are ideology-driven terrorists, or local gangsters, or even members of politically motivated death-squads. Secondly, they must understand terrorism has never been a primeval cause or an "original sin", it has always been preemptive, retaliatory, avenging, and a weapon of the weak or ideology-driven, marginalised people's violence against the powerful. Finally, it's time to find out the motives of the killings, and who could be the actual beneficiary (ies) of the crime.

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Turkey's democracy on trial



FROM A BYSTANDER
Mahmood Hasan

THE recent political developments in Turkey has not come as a surprise. On May 5, 2016, the popular Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu announced that he will resign following serious

rifts with the president. It is all related to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ambition to become an executive president. Under the current parliamentary system, he only has a ceremonial role in state affairs.

Erdogan's authoritarian streak was not so prominent when his Islam-leaning Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, promising to uphold Turkey's secular traditions. After winning five successive elections, Erdogan has become unstoppable. For instance, on May 2, a bill withdrawing immunity of deputies was passed when a brawl erupted in the Parliament, apparently designed to corner opposition parliamentarians. On May 6, Erdogan said that "the existing parliamentary system is a cause of crisis." Therefore, a presidential system would be offered to people.

One of the probable reasons for opting for the presidential system is to reduce the uncertainties associated with the Parliament's make-up. The June 2015 election showed that AKP was the biggest party in the Parliament but it had no majority. It tried to form a coalition government but failed. Hence came the snap election in November 2015 when AKP regained its majority. A strong executive president, elected directly by the people, will be able to govern anyway, even if the government party loses Parliament majority.

Erdogan may be planning another election in October 2016 to secure 330 (it now has 317) seats required to approve the constitutional amendment to public referendum. Interestingly, on May 1, 2016, a



Turkey's Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu (left) announced that he would step down in two weeks as ruling party chief and premier, boosting President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's (right) growing powers.

mysterious blog, (probably by an Erdogan supporter) titled "Pelican Briel" appeared in The Turkish Sun, giving an account on why Ahmet Davutoglu lost his job.

One of the insinuations in the blog is that Davutoglu was a "traitor". Davutoglu was chosen as Prime Minister to help facilitate the transition to the presidential system, but he did not support the reform. Davutoglu made deals with the European Union and presented them as his success. The "treacherous" Davutoglu tried to pass a "transparency law"; he tried to broker a deal with the Kurdish militants; and opposed the jailing of two journalists of The Cumhuriyet. The daily published reports that Turkey's intelligence service was smuggling weapons to Islamists in Syria. The two leaders had serious disagreements over the trial of these journalists. Finally, in late April 2016, Erdogan (founder of AKP) stripped Davutoglu's (president of AKP) powers to appoint provincial party executives.

On May 5, 2016, Davutoglu met President Erdogan when the two leaders decided to part ways. These two men were pillars of stability in Turkey since 2003. Later, Davutoglu announced his decision

to step down at the next Party Congress, refraining from criticising Erdogan. Many have described Davutoglu's departure as a "palace coup".

Clearly, Erdogan has decided to not tolerate any opposition to his agenda. AKP is scheduled to hold an extraordinary congress on May 22 to elect a successor to Davutoglu. Evidently, the next prime minister-cum-AKP president will be loyal to Erdogan and not steal the show from him.

One wonders why Erdogan chose to sack his prime minister at a time when Turkey faces security challenges. The situation in adjoining Syria is far more complicated now than it was a year ago. Erdogan's Syrian policy to unseat Bashar Al Assad has failed. Ankara's relations with Moscow suffered a serious setback when Turkey shot down a Russian jet over Syria. Turkey's relations with Egypt and Israel are strained. Turkey has a rocky relation with Europe, as it has been negotiating a difficult deal on how to stop Syrian refugees from crossing over to the continent. The deal is linked to get EU's agreement to allow Turkish nationals to travel to the Schengen area without visa. Erdogan's decision to bomb Kurdish

militants in Syria and Iraq had further complicated Turkey's internal security. There have been bomb attacks in Istanbul and Ankara over the past months, killing scores of people.

However, AKP is still united, and given Erdogan's popular image among Turkey's pious masses, he will probably get his way and be the executive president. But the concentration of executive power in the presidency is very risky - it not only tends to become authoritarian and abusive, but also emboldens opposition parties to revolt.

Erdogan may see protests from the secular sections, something akin to the Arab Spring. If that happens Turkey's situation may not be very different from that of Syria.

The fear is that the powerful military may be encouraged to stage a comeback as it has done five times since 1960. The military generals, who still idolise Kemal Ataturk, have always considered themselves as the guardian of secularism in Turkey.

Turkey has been a model of secularism and democracy in the Middle Eastern region and had proved that religion and democracy are indeed compatible. That myth seems to be waning. Its Arab neighbours - Iraq, Syria, Egypt, GCC countries, and others - are ruled by authoritarian presidents or monarchs with no democracy or human rights in sight. Will Erdogan be another Bashar or Qaddafi? After hosting two important summits, G20 (November 15, 2015) and OIC (April 14, 2016), where Erdogan rubbed shoulders with world leaders, the dismissal of Davutoglu has smeared his reputation as a democratic world leader.

Erdogan probably wants to transform Turkey's "secular republic" credentials and restore the lost glory of the Ottoman Caliphate. Kemal Ataturk, the founder of secular Republic of Turkey, must be turning in his grave at what's happening to Turkey. Indeed, Turkey's democracy is now on trial.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The values of Sheuli

Nyctanthes arbor-tristis is better known as night jasmine in English and sheuli in Bengali. This soul-touching flower with its snowy white petals and orange centre is called the queen of night as it prefers the silence of the night to bloom. In the past, we used to see sheuli trees alongside many houses. But it is not seen so often now. I remember an incident of my childhood when my mother was crying silently and could not eat



anything that day when a sheuli tree near our house was chopped off. Such love for trees is very rare nowadays.

Sheuli tree has tremendous medicinal values. It is used for the treatment of anxiety, restlessness, headache, gastritis and

hepatitis. Sheuli leaves are used for the treatment of ringworm, arthritis, fevers, skin problems and pain. It tastes bitter but it has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory compound. You can rid of your dandruff or lice problem by using sheuli treatment. We can also use it as mild laxative and as expectorant in cough and cold. So we should plant more sheuli trees. Roadside can be used in that purpose.
Sujit De
 Kolkata, India

Keeping the city clean

Dhaka South City Corporation has done a great job by placing waste bins at different locations in the city. I hope Dhaka North City Corporation will take similar measures in creating mass awareness among citizens to keep our cities clean, as it has become a regular practice to dump garbage on the roadsides. It is our city and it is our duty to keep it clean.
Aminur Rahim
 Mohakhali, Dhaka



PHOTO: STAR